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“PO USTAVU” - ACCORDING TO THE TYPICON

THE RITUALS AND SINGING OF THE RUSSIAN OLD BELIEVERS

INTRODUCTION

In the middle of the 1600's, Patriarch Nikon, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (now commonly called the Moscow Patriarchate), decided that the rituals of the Russian Church had strayed away from their original forms which the Russians had received from the Byzantine Church in the 10th to 12th centuries. Unfortunately, he failed to observe the crucial fact that every national jurisdiction of Orthodoxy had developed its own regional and local traditions of church singing, iconography, interpretation of the Typicon, etc., and against the advice of various other of the Eastern Patriarchs, he blindly decided that Russia's rituals needed to be "corrected" to conform precisely with the contemporary Greek Church. (Sadly, these "reforms" were based directly on the Venetian printed editions of Greek service books, which were not entirely faithful to the "received" manuscript traditions.)

Under the guise of preserving national unity, the campaign of "reforms" (1654-66) were carried out with a spirit of intolerance toward those who did not agree with Patriarch Nikon's goals. The Moscow Council of 1666-67 formally upheld Patriarch Nikon's reforms, wrongly anathematized the Old Ritualists (a significant percentage of the nation's population), and deposed Patriarch Nikon for abandoning his office as a result of an altercation with Tsar Alexei. The disastrous result was a severely fractured Russian Church, and the consequences of the "Schism" have lasted to this day. On the one hand we have the modern "State Church", which upheld the "reforms", and on the other hand we have the Old Believers or Old Ritualists, who have led a separate existence and maintained a deeply spiritual counter-culture since the mid-1600s. (It is ironic to note that since that time, the modern Greek and Russian Churches have once again developed liturgical lives and rituals that have diverged from one another in many significant ways.)

Following the "Schism", the Old Believers soon divided into two separate groups of faithful: the "priested" Old Believers have struggled to retain Apostolic succession and the sacramental life (by obtaining their hierarchy via the Ecumenical Patriarchate), while the "priestless" Old Believers feel that the possibility of an on-going Apostolic succession was impossible, since no bish-

ops had openly broken ranks with Patriarch Nikon and separated themselves from the Moscow Patriarchate in defense of the Old Rituals. (The priestless Old Believers continue to maintain a nearly full cycle of services, but without the Divine Liturgy and the sacramental life.) The two groups do not generally consider themselves in opposition to each other, but frequently maintain dialogues and share many common cultural and literary resources (especially the republication of pre-Nikonian liturgical books). In reality, they consider themselves to be in opposition to the "State Church" and the modern secular and atheistic culture.

A. IDEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Before discussing the particular features of liturgical singing in the Old Rite traditions, we first need to be aware of the fundamental principles in the external modes of worship according to Russia's medieval spiritual culture.

The most fundamental principle of Old Rite worship is the strict observance of the Typicon as the ideal method of helping Orthodox Christians achieve salvation, particularly by means of the ascetic struggles and inner discipline required to accomplish this lofty goal. As a rule, a complete cycle of services must be performed for any given day that the Divine Liturgy will be served, and the concluding Vespers and Compline must likewise be served. Anyone who wishes to receive Communion must attend the full cycle of services offered as part of his/her preparation. Furthermore, it is completely unacceptable to abbreviate the services, and everything should be done strictly according to the Typicon (по уставу, "po ustavu").

The Old Believers follow the Sabbaitic (Jerusalem) Typicon according to the pre-Nikonian printed rescension, which is based on a manuscript tradition not clearly identified by historians. However, some trace elements of the earlier Studite Typicon continue to survive to this day. (As an example: many Old Rite parishes choose to not serve the All-Night Vigil on Saturday evenings, but serve Vespers in the evening and Matins, the Hours and Liturgy in the morning.) As one can see from the photo, the Typicon (which is called "Око церковное", "The Eye of the Church") is an extremely large volume; it contains almost all of the instructions for conducting worship services for every day of the year and for every possible coinciding of feasts.

Together with the observance of a full cycle of services for laity in parishes comes the ideological concept that there is barely any difference between monastic life and the lives of laity. If we as Orthodox Christians are indeed already called to lead lives apart from the world while living in the world, then the idolizing of monasticism as superior to the lay life is revealed as a flawed manner of thinking. As part of Old Believer philosophy, we feel that living the Christian life in all its fullness is what we are called to do, no matter our calling or station in life; some people choose to live the monastic life because they find it too difficult to fully dedicate their lives to God in the mainstream world, and